



THE DRINK TANK 453

That there's an España Sheriff cover, you know??? She was nominated for the Hugo this year!

This issue is one that I've wanted us to tackle for a while, and when the whole "How often do you think of the Roman Empire?" Thing hit social media, we pulled the trigger. I'm pleased to say we got some great stuff in for it too!

I'm happy to say that 2024 is likely to be a fun year! Our first issue of next year is all about Bob's Burgers and I love that show so much! What else we gonna be doin'? Well, Dark Hollywood will be early, and there's gonna be an issue early in the year dedicated to Mexican food!!!

Trust me, it won't be all recipes.

OK, enough! Happy New Year!!!

Also...Nessa for TAFF!!!!



THOUGHTS ON ANCIENT ROMA BY CHRIS DUVAL



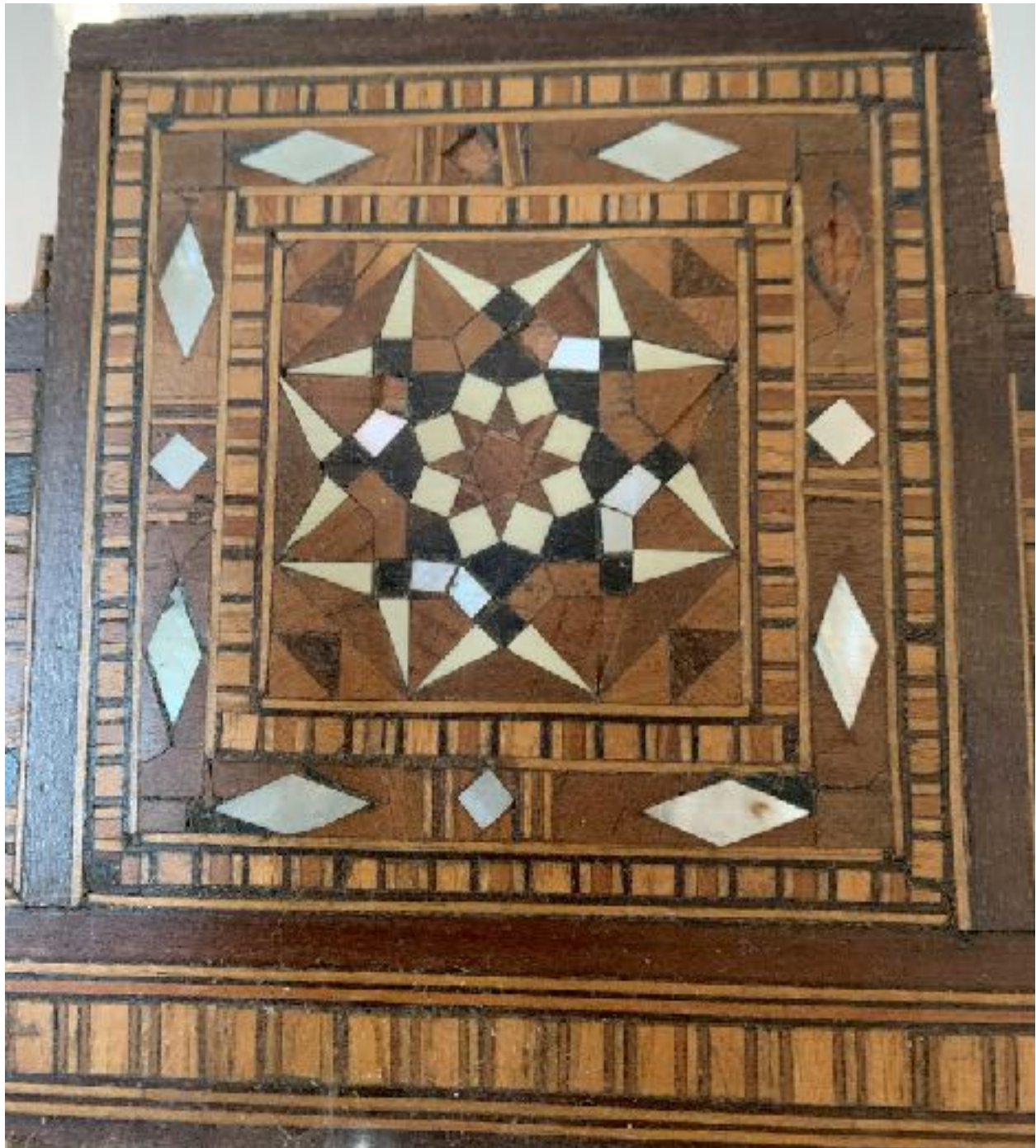
In the Maknās District of the Kingdom of al-Maghribiyah (Morocco) lie the ruins of Volubilis, which I visited in 1990 with Kathy.

I thought to write about one of the mosaics, the Abduction of Hylas, since the taking (or near taking) of someone by water humanoids ties in with a couple of recent books by different authors (S.A. Chakraborty, Seanan McGuire).



But then I decided to focus on the marginal patterns and compare them to modern mass-produced (but not machine-produced) designs that are in common throughout what were once the North African and Levantine provinces of the Roman Empire. I planned to use details from a “Syrian” chair we own for comparison. I didn’t know if there was causal continuity, but it seemed plausible.

But the Crux Gammata (Cross of [four] Greek letter Γ’s) that is in the left center of the bottom margin of the Abduction mosaic, though innocuous when laid down, has such terrible associations today that I gave up on this course.



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Another idea was to talk about another place we visited in 1990: The tomb or mausoleum of Juba II in today's Tibaza (Ar.) Province of al-Jazā'iriyah (Algeria). Juba was a Roman puppet just before his kingdom was absorbed into the empire and the monument in his honor is an impressive domed cylinder. Kathy's diary of the time (read with permission) recounts how we sought it out from our campsite, crossing fields and roads only to find it closed for the day (and guarded by fences and dogs). Our journey back was quicker, partly because we chose a more efficient path and partly because familiarity with a path makes a journey on it subjectively faster. I intended to expand on the asymmetry of journeys and mention the two Tolkien epics, but I wanted a photo, and, though I know we took them, I couldn't find them. Again, I abandoned an idea. (There are lots of other's online photos, should you be curious.)
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Half a year ago, I would have written about the trio of the Beit She'an site of the Roman Decapolis, the Caesarea aqueduct (both visited in 2008), and chatting with others sheltering from the heat under Titus's Arch in Roma (visited in 2003). I know what I would have said a while back, but I am afraid now. Someone with as much skill as Samuel Clemens navigating the shoals of the Mississippi could manage, but that person isn't me.

Here instead are photos without comments.





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I'll briefly mention a Roman impact on a place they didn't know existed. The lead layers in the Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) ice cap are due to the pollution from the smelting of Roman silver coins. I don't remember how I learned this—perhaps in my introductory geology course—but you can easily read up about

it from numerous online searches. Some of these speculate about correlations between the ups and downs of the empire and the ice cap's lead.

I also couldn't find a photo that I know we took of the Umbilicus Urbis (Navel of the World) in the Roman forum. There's a nondescript spot marking what was once the center of the European/ Middle Eastern/ North African world. I considered contrasting this with Hindu India's Navel of the World that I had read about. I remember Amartya Sen in his "The Argumentative Indian" had an essay about South Asian prime meridians but I don't remember if that discussion included a 'navel.' Web-searching today I see there are several candidates for 'navels of the world' in the sub-continent.

The ancient Roman tradition persists. On Italian television on a patriotic holiday, we watched PM Berlusconi presiding over military displays below in the Circus Maximus. An Alpine Unit, wearing heavy winter clothes as they would when skiing in the country's north, sweltered as they paraded in the heat. It seemed heartless, but I guess PMs, like emperors, can be indifferent to suffering. If Suetonius wrote a thirteenth chapter about the PM, this callousness would be in his deficits section.

Another vestige: Manhole covers near the forum still have the abbreviation for Senate and People of Roma:



ATTENDING AN AUGUSTAN BANQUET:
OVID PONDERSVIRGIL
BY CHUCK SERFACE

Apollo, carved from imitative stone,
Surveys our table. None but he alone,
I'd thought, whose arms reach out above our
heads,
Could dictate art, extract pure gold from lead.
The ligaments, the veins, each supple curve
In every limb combine. What aim is served?
Why, art, of course. In art, all parts are joined,
Embodied into truths, and truths to nature shine!

And while Apollo, father of all great
Afflation, hopes to guide each artist's fate,
Our Maro fills his ego and his plate.

Messalla prods me on. "Salute him! Art
Begins within, but patronage imparts
The gift of never-ending voice," he says.
"The poet scrawls unheard, and none can guess,
Without a proper guide, when chance will bring
Auspicious stages, ears to hear you sing!
All Rome became like Virgil's special page,
The War his barren slate, and Troy his gauge
By which our past is measured. Why, you ask?
No word of Virgil's art, from first to last,
Exists unless Augustus wills it first."

My toga virilis seems a bit unversed,
And Virgil's gilded robes reveal his place.
No other poet fabricates our age,
But still I wonder. Will he aid my words,
Or aid his will in leaving them unheard?
The dying screams of Dido we still hear
Because divine-blown storms, although severe,
Provided passage for Aeneas' ship.
Should poets only speak for states, restrict
Our voices, stem the passion from our souls?

Messalla! Please forgive me! How the bowl
Containing vibrant, lusty fruits allures
Me! Any poet's gift would stay unsure,
Exiled from any truth, if one should sound
An art bound up by autocratic shrouds!



ROMAN ENGLAND BY ESPAÑA SHERIFF

I grew up in Malaga, and Rome was everywhere, in the culture and the language, of course, but also as a real tangible presence in stone, a particularly resilient layer in the historical palimpsest of the region. Covering the faint Phoenician traces and thrusting up stubborn aqueducts, theaters, and villas all through the later Visigoth, Moorish, and eventually Spanish landscape. The construction boom of the seventies and eighties was a constant race between eager developers trying to lay foundations and frantic archeologists attempting to preserve the mosaics and necropolises inevitably unearthed.

Roman Britain feels ghostlier, the story of Londinium is shrouded in myth and legend, from the rumored temple of Diana located under St. Paul's to the baffling lore surrounding the otherwise mundane-looking London Stone. Two thousand years of fires, war, and growth have buried its structures and repurposed its very bricks into the ever-expanding metropolis of modern-day London. Its museums contain plenty of artifacts dug up over the years, and you can find isolated bits of wall scattered about the place, but there is no central colosseum or monument to serve as a focus for the imagination. Except possibly the London Mithraeum.



Rediscovered in 1954, the Mithraeum was unearthed, assembled, disassembled, relocated, and finally after years of wrangling, disputes, and redesigns, restored as closely as possible to its original shape and location under the newly-built European headquarters of the Bloomberg Company. The result is a beautifully staged experience, with lighting effects by artist Matthew Scheiber that slowly reveal the space using light, shadow, and mist to fill in the missing pieces, while a soundscape brings to life first the ancient ceremony to Mithras, and then the more mundane sounds of the sort of social gatherings known to take place in these temples. It's a strange subterranean sojourn under a modern global financial center.

Outside of London, with a bit more room to breathe and less of an endless churn of building and growth, you can find occasional gems like the ruins at Bath or the Chedworth Roman Villa, but they seem sparse, spread apart, and slightly apocalyptic. The feeling is very much of the edges of an empire, abandoned rather than defeated.

And in the North, there is the Wall.

Originally stretching from coast to coast and standing as tall as three and a half meters by some accounts, Hadrian's Wall consisted of over a hundred kilometers of solid effort to establish a northern frontier and keep the barbarians out, as well as probably controlling the comings and goings of those within. What remains today is still impressive in its scope and its impact on the landscape and local history, and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The length of the Wall is dotted with forts, most of which are now museums and many of which have added reconstructions that give you a better feel for what it was like originally. In the gift shop, you can always find the Hadrian's Wall Path Passport, for those who want to walk its entire length and collect a nifty certificate upon completion.

Some sections are little more than ditches, the stones repurposed by farmers or turned into General Wade's Military Road in the 18th century, but enough remains that you can follow from coast to coast. It weaves in and out of the modern landscape from the east at Wallsend, its Segedunum fort sandwiched between an ASDA and a Metro station, through Newcastle, where a section of wall was unearthed just two years ago and the remains of a temple sitting in a quiet suburban neighborhood, little more than a fence and a plaque marking its importance, through open countryside and farmlands, with stops at forts and museums at the better-preserved locations, and eventually finds its westernmost point in the village of Bowness-on-Solway, which is also apparently an Area of Outstanding National Beauty (although if I'm honest the penultimate stop in Carlisle has a train station and looks a lot more fun unless you're a completist!).



GARUM, POSCA, AND SILPHIUM: WHERE ARE THEY NOW? BY CHRISTOPHER J. GARCIA

The Roman Empire had to eat. They had their tastes and their health to consider, and some of them either didn't translate to new times or simply didn't make it to us as we are today. Three of the things that were well-known and even loved in Roman times are very much worth considering.

Let's start with silphium.

Now, silphium was an herb that had a distinctive and cherished flavor, often described as a harmonious blend of garlic, onion, and resin. Now, while that might make me think of eating a mummy, it was one of the most beloved ingredients in Roman cuisine, used in dishes ranging from succulent meats to humble vegetables. Like truffles in France and gravy in the South, adding it to any dish made it two or three levels classier. Super important in the kitchen, silphium was highly valued for its medicinal applications. It kind of filled the role that ginger plays in several cuisines, serving as a remedy for digestive issues and coughs. Its resin, though, was a treasured ingredient for various healing concoctions, though we've found no traces of the stuff, and we've found traces of a whole bunch of other foods and beverages, especially wines.

Why can't we just go and pick some to add it to our simple stews? Well, it went extinct.

It was likely over-harvested, and there's been significant climate change. and in Cyrene, now a part of Libya, things got considerably drier. The likely cause is over-harvesting, though. The best evidence for that has to be that Cyrene had it as their main export; this was clear because they featured the herb on their coins.

Can we find some now? It's unlikely in the wild, but if we can find a suitable example of a seed, we can likely do a lot of genetic testing and modifying.

The next one is a very different thing, a drink, and one that has an incredible tie to military history.

In the bustling streets of ancient Rome, you might be walking around and come across a vendor selling posca. It was a beverage that crossed social boundaries, uniting the plebeians and the patricians, the laborers and the elites, the rich and the who-cares-about-them. Posca was pretty damn simple; it began with the basics, water and either wine or vinegar. That's it. A splash of acidity from vinegar or a hint of sweetness from wine was enough to turn ordinary water into a generous elixir! The exact blend varied, depending on individual taste and means, but the essence remained the same.

Ordinary citizens weren't regularly able to afford wine, so posca was a more economical choice for laborers, but posca wasn't just a thirst-quencher; it was medicine, too. In its vinegar-based form, it held trace nutrients and compounds believed to aid digestion and promote health, alleviate ailments, and it was not uncommon to see a villager sipping posca to deal with the billions of diseases that attacked everyone during the period.

Roman legionnaires would march across distant lands carrying posca with them. This is so similar to the days when British sailors would take rum with them, only to add water, sometimes some citrus juice or sugar, and that would help keep sailors happy, even healthy, as trace nutrients helped to prevent things like scurvy, which helped. Posca was easy to make, had nutritional value that plain water doesn't, and had flavor, which always helps.

So, why aren't we still drinking posca? Well, our palettes have become less accustomed to drinking vinegar (save for health nuts who still drink apple cider vinegar), and watered-down wine is still drunk at every art gallery opening. The thing is, clean water became more accessible to source and store, and wine, beer, and spirits came down in price.

And that leaves us with the most enigmatic of all the Roman ingredients: garum.

Let's say you're a culture with a proud sea-faring tradition. You're a fishing people, and there are a lot of mackerel and the like. They're usually pretty easy to catch, with anchovies being the easiest since you can just

drag a net, and you'll likely catch many of them. Once you have all these oily little fishes, you could try and eat them, but they're kind of hard to eat because they tend to be small. Instead, you could cut them, pack them in salt, leave them outside, and let them ferment. That makes sense, right?

So, you'd start by layering the fish with salt in large containers or possibly open concrete pits. Home garum, and people did it at home, was in vessels, but it appears that there were open-pit garum manufacturing sites. You'd layer some salt, then some fish, then some herbs, then some more salt, then some more fish, and on and on. You'd let it ferment under the sun, stirring it every once in a while. Eventually, it separated into liquids that floated on top, that was garum and solids, called allec, as well. The garum would be bottled or jugged, and the allec solids, pickled (but might still have tiny bones in it) would be dried and used as a condiment or maybe left wet and spread on bread.



Garum was used liberally in Roman cooking, both savory and sweet. It's an umami bomb, adding depth to the stews, soups, and sauces the Romans dug. Garum was often diluted with wine or other liquids to create a milder sauce called liquamen. This added another level of potential price-gouging. If you had top-notch garum (the best fish was the type of mackerel called "scomber") and top-notch wine, you would pay for it.

The pungency of garum could vary, and though you'd think the garum creation process would be an olfactory nightmare, that wasn't necessarily so. It's not rotted fish sauce; the innards of the fish were included, and with enough salt, but not too much, the juices of the fish themselves started to digest the flesh and innards of the fish, so it wasn't a super-stinky affair.

Folks have started making garum again, mostly for YouTube, and in a couple of ways, it's only kind of been gone. There are still a couple of similar fish sauces around, including *colatura di alici*, Campania's famed fish sauce, *nam pla*, Thai fish sauce, *nuoc mam*, which is Vietnam's version of *nam pla*, and *patis* -- a similar sauce that is one of Filipino cooking's great joys.

Though an entire garum production facility was found in Pompeii, and a few amphorae have been found with traces of garum, none of them seem to have included any silphium, which may speak to the role of each food in the Roman world. If garum in the factory-type setting in Pompeii weren't made for the nobility, it wouldn't include such a highly prized ingredient, would it?

LET'S ALL EAT LIKE THE ROMANS ATE BY CHRISTOPHER J. GARCIA

I approached this issue with the idea that I wanted to see what would be possible in the food space. Don't I always approach everything with my stomach?

I read up on a lot of Roman eating habits, found a few recipes, and considered how to make a modern-ish version of them. Most are pretty normal, but some are a bit out there.



Moretum (Herb and Cheese Spread)

Ingredients

Fresh coriander leaves
Fresh mint leaves
Garlic cloves
Hard cheese (Pecorino Romano or Parmesan)
Olive oil
Salt

Instructions

In a mortar and pestle, combine coriander leaves, mint leaves, and peeled garlic cloves. Grind the ingredients together to form a paste. Grate the hard cheese and mix it into the herb paste. Drizzle olive oil into the mixture until you achieve a spreadable consistency. Season with salt to taste.

The Romans used this on bread, and it was typically a middle-class food, though often lower-class folks who couldn't afford meat would also use it to make Bread for Dinner into something a bit more enjoyable. Later recipes mention nuts, including pinenuts, which would make this the grandpappy of the famed Italian multi-tool pesto.

Moretum

Ingredientia

Folia coriandri recentia
Folia mentae recentia
Dentes allii
Caseus durus (Pecorino Romano vel Parmesanus)
Oleum olivarum
Sal

Instructiones

In mortario et pistillo, folia coriandri, folia mentae, et dentes allii pelati commisceto. Ingredients simul terito donec pasta fiant. Caseum durum grate et in pastam herbarum misce. Oleum olivarum in miscellam instillato donec consistencia diffundibilis attingatur. Sal ad gustum condito.

Fundamentaliter, hoc Romani in pane utebantur et solitum cibum erat, licet etiam plerique vulgo qui carnes non emere poterant uterentur ut ex pane cenam facerent aliquid voluptarius. Posteriora carmina nucleos, inter quos pini, commemorant, quod hoc faciat vetustissimum pesto Italicum multorum instrumentorum.



Pullum Frontonianum (Roman-Style Chicken)

Ingredients

4 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon garum (fermented fish sauce) or
Worcestershire sauce
1 lemon, zest and juice
3 cloves garlic, minced
Salt, to taste

Instructions

Preheat the Oven:

Preheat your oven to 375°F (190°C).

Prepare the Chicken:

Pat the chicken thighs dry.

In a bowl, combine olive oil, black pepper, cumin, oregano, garum (or Worcestershire sauce), lemon zest, lemon juice, and minced garlic.

Marinate the Chicken:

Rub the chicken thighs with the prepared marinade, ensuring they are well coated.

Allow the chicken to marinate for at least 30 minutes to let the flavors penetrate.

Season with Salt:

Before cooking, sprinkle the chicken with salt to taste.

Cook the Chicken:

Heat a skillet over medium-high heat.

Sear the chicken thighs, skin side down, until golden brown (about 3-4 minutes).

Flip the chicken and transfer the skillet to the preheated oven.

Roast in the Oven:

Roast the chicken in the oven until it reaches an internal temperature of 165°F (74°C), about 25-30 minutes.

Serve:

Once cooked, let the chicken rest for a few minutes before serving.

Garnish with additional lemon zest and fresh herbs if desired.

This would have been a rare treat in most Roman households, and this would certainly speak to modern Italian cuisine's love of chicken and lemon. I made this years and years ago, using fish sauce instead of garum, and it worked out nicely.



Pullum Frontonianum

Ingredientia

4 coxas pulli cum ossibus et cute
2 coclearia olei olivae
1 cocleare minimum piperis nigrum
1 cocleare minimum cuminum
1 cocleare minimum origani siccum
1 cocleare minimum garum (liquamen fermentatum piscium) vel Worcestershire sauce
1 limon, zestum et succus
3 dentes allii, minutatim concisi
Sal ad gustum

Instructiones

Furnum Calefacere:

Furnum tuum ad 375°F (190°C) praecalefacito.

Pullum Parare:

Coxas pulli extergito.
In catino, oleum olivae, piper nigrum, cuminum, origanum, garum (vel Worcestershire sauce), limonis zestum, limonis succum, et allium minutatim concisum commisce.

Pullum Marinare:

Coxas pulli cum marinata bene unguento inunguito.
Sinite pullum marinari saltem per triginta minuta ut saporis bene penetrare possint.

Salis Adiungere:

Ante coquendum, sal ad gustum pullum adiicito.

Pullum Coquere:

In catino super ignem medium calefacito.

Coxas pulli, cute versa in ius, donec aureae fiant (circiter 3-4 minuta) arrosti.

In Furno Torrere:

Pullum in furno torreo donec temperatura interna attingat 165°F (74°C), circiter 25-30 minuta.

Servire:

Cum coctus sit, pullum paucis minutis ad requiem relinquito.

Si vis, limonis zestum et herbas recentes ad ornatum adiicito.

Hoc in plerisque domibus Romanis raritas fuisset, certe autem loqueretur de amore Italico coquinae modernae ad pullum et citrum. Ego hoc feci multos annos ante, utens Liquamine pro garo, et bene successit.

Isicia Omentata

Ingredients

1 pound ground beef or a mixture of beef and pork
2 slices of white bread, crusts removed
1/4 cup red wine
1 small onion, finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon garum (fermented fish sauce) or Worcestershire sauce
Olive oil for cooking
Salt to taste

Prepare the Meat Mixture:

In a bowl, soak the bread slices in red wine until fully saturated.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the ground meat, soaked bread (squeeze out excess liquid), chopped onion, minced garlic, black pepper, oregano, and garum or Worcestershire sauce.

Mix Thoroughly:

Use your hands to mix the ingredients thoroughly until well combined. The soaked bread helps keep the patties moist.

Form Patties:

Take a handful of the meat mixture and shape it into small, flat patties.

Cooking:

Heat olive oil in a skillet over medium heat.

Cook the patties for about 4-5 minutes on each side or until they are browned and cooked through.

Serve:

Once cooked, transfer the patties to a serving plate.

Optionally, sprinkle with a bit of salt before serving.

Garnish (Optional):

Garnish with fresh herbs like parsley or oregano for a burst of freshness.

Burgers much?

Isicia Omentata

Ingredientia

1 libra carnis bovinæ huius vel commixtionis ex carne bovina et porcina
2 bucellae panis albi, crustis exemptis
1/4 cyathus vini rubri
1 cepa parva, minutatim concisa
2 dentes allii, minutatim concisi
1 cocleare minimum piperis nigrum
1 cocleare minimum origani siccum
1 cocleare minimum garum (liquamen fermentatum piscium) vel Worcestershire sauce
Oleum olivarum ad coquendum
Sal ad gustum

Mixtura Carnis Parare:

In catino, bucellas panis in vino rubro immerge donec plane emolliantur.

In catino magno, carnem trituratam, panem imbibitum (liquorem superfluum exprime), cepam concisam, allium minutatim concisum, piper nigrum, origanum et garum vel Worcestershire sauce commisce.

Bene Misce:

Manibus tuis ingredientes diligenter misce donec bene commisceantur. Panis emollitus adiuvat ut pastilli sint umidi.

Pastillos Formare:

Sumito manipulum de mixtura carne et fac ex eo pastillos parvos et planos.

Coquere:

Oleum olivarum in patella super ignem medium calefacito. Pastillos circa 4-5 minutos per latus vel donec bene rufescent et bene cocti sunt coquito.

Ferre:

Cum cocti sunt, pastillos in patellam ferito. Si vis, adde modicum salis ante ferendum.

Hamburgers valde?

Testaroli

Ingredients

2 cups chestnut flour
2 cups all-purpose flour
3 cups water
1 teaspoon salt
Extra-virgin olive oil (for greasing)

Instructions

Prepare the Batter:

In a large mixing bowl, combine the chestnut flour, all-purpose flour, and salt. Gradually add water while whisking to create a smooth, lump-free batter. The consistency should be similar to pancake batter.

Rest the Batter:

Rest for at least 30 minutes. This resting period helps the flour absorb the water and improves the texture of the Testaroli.

Cooking:

Heat a flat, non-stick pan or a testo (traditional Italian griddle) over medium heat.
Grease the pan lightly with olive oil.

Pour and Cook:

Pour a ladle of batter onto the hot pan, spreading it evenly to create a thin layer, much like a crepe.

Flip and Cook:

When the edges of the testaroli start to lift and the surface bubbles, it's time to flip it. Cook briefly on the other side until it develops a golden hue.

Repeat:

Repeat the process with the remaining batter. Stack the cooked testaroli on a plate.

Serve:

Testaroli can be served warm and cut into irregular shapes or squares. Traditionally, they are dressed with pesto, olive oil, or a simple tomato sauce.

Everyone says this needs to be topped with pesto, but authenticity would call for moretum, yes? Chestnut flour is delightful, especially for gravies.



Testaroli

Ingredientia

2 cyathi farina castanea
2 cyathi farina universa
3 cyathi aqua
1 cocleare minimum salis Oleum olivarum extra virginem (ad oleum unguendum)

Instructiones

Battum Parare:

In catino magno, farinam castaneam, farinam universam, et salinem commisce.

Paulatim aquam addas dum misces ut efficias pastam levem et sine grumis.

Consistentia simile sit pastae panque.

Battum Restinere:

Per triginta circiter minuta restina.

Hoc tempus requietionis adiuvat farinam aquam absorbere et texturam Testaroli meliorem facere.

Coquere:

Patellam aplanatam, non adhaerentem vel testum (testo more antiquo) super ignem medium calefacias. Panem leviter oleo olivae ungas.

Fundere et Coquere:

Ladle pastam in patellam calidam funde, aequè expandens ut stratum tenue fiat, instar crepundiae.

Verte et Coquere:

Cum ora Testaroli surgere incipiant et superficies bulliat, tempus est eam vertere.

Parum in alia parte coque donec auream colorem obtineat.

Iterare:

Processum cum reliqua pasta repetito. Testaroli coctos in discum composito.

Feruire:

Testaroli calidi serviri possunt, in formas inaequales vel quadratas secati.

More antiquo, solent pesto, oleo olivae vel simplici salsa tomata ornari.

Omnes dicunt hoc pesto deleri debere, sed vere potius moretum decorem necessarium esse, numquid non? Farina castanea iucunda est, maxime in iusculis.

